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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THAILAND: NEWS AND NOTES ON THE ROYAL FAMILY

REF: BANGKOK 8344

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH L. BOYCE. REASON 1.4(D)

THE KING COMMENTS

¶1. (SBU) On January 27, I attended the annual Prince Mahidol awards ceremony, which the King directly presides over. The annual awards, named in honor of the King's father, are presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions in the fields of medicine or public health. Princess Sirindhorn acted as the Master of Ceremony for this year's event. I was invited because one of this year's honorees is an American citizen, Professor Jonathan Samet of the John Hopkins School of Public Health. The other honoree, a professor at the University of Geneva, is a German citizen.

¶2. (S) Following the ceremony, a small group was invited into a small ante-room for a private audience with the King. The group included Princess Sirindhorn, the two award winners and their spouses, the German Ambassador and me.

¶3. (S) During the audience the King showed great interest in all exchanges, and became deeply engaged in a conversation revolving around the issues of mental health and family stability, and their impact on human development. These issues are obviously near and dear to the heart of the King, and while involved in this free-flowing conversation, he made several notable remarks. (Note: During his latest annual birthday message, given on December 5, 2004, the King, who usually comments on political issues of importance, focused on the need for the RTG to safeguard the health and education of Thai youth. End Note.)

¶4. (S) Discussing the topic of family stability, the King commented, "I understand how important it is to have both a mother and a father in a family unit. I lost my father at a very early age, and was raised by my mother. While she did a wonderful job of raising her children, she could not, alone, replace the role of a father."

¶5. (S) When the conversation turned towards siblings the King said, "My older sister, Galyani, was always the 'pillar' for me. I have always relied on her for guidance and support. But now that she is 82, I worry about her."

¶6. (S) At one point in the conversation, the King stopped and gestured towards Princess Sirindhorn, who was engaged in a side conversation with the wife of the German award winner. The King quietly said, "I have four children. But she (Sirindhorn) is the only one who 'sits on the ground with the people.' She never married, but she has millions of children."

LATEST ON THE ROYAL FAMILY

¶7. (SBU) I called on Dr. Chirayu Isarangkul na Ayuthaya, Director-General of the Crown Property, on February 1, 2005. The following tidbits on royal family matters emerged:

¶8. (S) First, and most significantly, Dr. Chirayu said that the Crown Prince's wife, Mom Srirasmi Mahidol, is pregnant. Separately, Tiriwat Sucharitakul, Advisor to Princess Sirindhorn, confirmed that this is indeed the case, but has not been made public because Mom Srirasmi has had miscarriages in the past. (Comment: Mom Srirasmi's pregnancy is a known secret in Thailand, particularly after a recent public appearance in which her expanding waistline was apparent. End Comment.)

¶9. (S) Turning to the Crown Prince's former consort, Mom Yuvathida (aka Mom Benz), Dr. Chirayu said that on the Queen's last visit to the United States she had agreed to an audience with Mom Benz and her children, but that Mom Benz had not made contact with the royal traveling party. Subsequently, Ambassador Sakthip was asked to travel to Florida to meet with Mom Benz and her children, but Mom Benz declined the meeting. Apparently, there is an issue of medical expenses for Mom Benz's third son; the Crown Prince reportedly has made it clear that he will cover these expenses and that he does not want his mother or father to be

burdened with the issue of his former family.

¶10. (S) Regarding the King's comment about Princess Sirindhorn (para. 6), Dr. Chirayu noted that it said as much about the failings of the King's other three children as his fondness and respect for Princess Sirindhorn. The other three had tried to carryout their royal responsibilities, but clearly were not as capable or interested as Princess Sirindhorn.

¶11. (S) On the King's warm comments about his sister, Princes Galyani, Chirayu noted, "she is the only one left" from the King's immediate family. Chirayu said that prior to 20-30 years ago, the King had been concerned about Princess Galyani, who went through a series of failed marriages, but of late had demonstrated ample commitment to her royal duties.

¶12. (S) In discussing the recent death of the King's grandson, Khun Poom Jensen, Chirayu said that he had had to undertake much of the bitter legal mediation between Princess Ubolratana and Peter Jensen. He noted that their separation and divorce had been quite nasty and that Mr. Jensen had not come to Thailand to attend his son's funeral. Chirayu said that he fended off queries as to where Mr. Jensen was by joking that he was afraid to come to Thailand because the Crown Prince would beat him up. (Comment: We have heard that Mr. Jensen borrowed money from several Thais and Thai banks prior to his divorce from Princess Ubolratana and that these funds have never been repaid. End Comment.) Dr. Chirayu also noted that the King was greatly touched by the outpouring of respect and warmth for Khun Poom since his death on December 26, 2004.

¶13. (S) Leaving no royal spawn uncommented upon, Chirayu commented briefly on Princess Chulabhorn's split from Group Captain Veerayudh Didyasarin, noting that Veerayudh, who resides in the United States, had had an audience with the Queen during her most recent visit. Royal relations with Veerayudh, the former Thai Assistant Air Attaché at the Embassy in Washington, are cordial.

BOYCE